



PLANTED BY THE STREAMS: AN EVENING IN THE PSALMS

TAPPING INTO THEOLOGY
DEACON RICK BAUER

AGENDA WE WILL TRY TO INTRODUCE



- **An Introduction to the Psalms**
 - Appreciating the poetry, understanding the text, formation, authorship, setting, and meaning of Hebrew poetry in the Psalms. Introducing Psalm types: Hymns of Praise, Psalms of Lament, Thanksgiving, Liturgical, Confidence, Divine Kingship/Christological, Wisdom



- **Discussion: Our Favorite Psalms**
 - Share which psalms have had particular impact on their life, and why
- **“A Long Obedience” : The Psalms of Ascent**
 - Insights on Christian Discipleship from Psalms 120-134 (highlights)

INTRODUCING THE PSALMS



- The Book of Psalms is a record of God's call and of his people's response, enacted a thousand times in history.
- The Psalms are a photograph album of ancient Israel in its relationship to God and a mirror of our own relationship and reaction to God who summons his people and promises his presence and secures the future.
- Any time we try to interpret the Psalms, a journal of Israel's life—so filled with joys and sorrows, inscribed with aspirations and failures—we will find ourselves experiencing a catharsis of the soul.
- But before we imbibe deeply of the spiritual riches of the Psalms, we need to deal with some pedestrian matters that will orient us to our study.

BEGIN THE MUSIC: A CALL TO WORSHIP



A long time ago, on some religious festival the congregation of Israel waited expectantly in the sanctuary to begin their worship, summoned perhaps by the musician or a priest to “sing” and “begin the music”:

Sing for joy to God our strength;
shout aloud to the God of Jacob!
Begin the music, strike the tambourine,
play the melodious harp and lyre.
Sound the ram’s horn at the New Moon,
and when the moon is full, on the day of our Feast;
this is a decree for Israel,
an ordinance of the God of Jacob. (Ps 81:1–4)

- It is rare in the Bible to have such a vivid picture of worship with its musical accompaniments as we have Psalm 81.
- The musical setting sets the stage for the awesome sermon that follows in verses 6–16. It is a succinct summary of Israel’s Salvation history. In fact, one could cut this page out of Israel’s national journal and have a synopsis of God’s action that brought Israel into being (vv. 6–10), along with Israel’s unfortunate response (vv. 11–16).
- Nearly every human emotion and response to God is found in the Psalms, the prayer book and hymnal of the Church for 2000 years.

THE PSALMS: ADULATION



¹Praise the LORD! Praise God in his sanctuary; praise him in his mighty firmament!

²Praise him for his mighty deeds; praise him according to his surpassing greatness!

³Praise him with trumpet sound; praise him with lute and harp!

⁴Praise him with tambourine and dance; praise him with strings and pipe!

⁵Praise him with clanging cymbals; praise him with loud clashing cymbals!

⁶Let everything that breathes praise the LORD!
Praise the LORD! (Psalm 150 (NRSVCE))

THE PSALMS: REASSURING COMFORT



A Psalm of David.

¹The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want.

²He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters;

³he restores my soul. He leads me in right paths for his name's sake.

⁴Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff— they comfort me.

⁵You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.

⁶Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD my whole life long. Psalm 23 (NRSVCE)

THE PSALMS: ABJECT ESTRANGEMENT



¹My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?
Why are you so far from helping me, from the
words of my groaning?

²O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer;
and by night, but find no rest. (Psalm 22:1–2
(NRSVCE))

THE PSALMS: OVERBEARING SIN



³For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me.

⁴Against you, you alone, have I sinned, and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are justified in your sentence and blameless when you pass judgment.

⁵Indeed, I was born guilty, a sinner when my mother conceived me. (Psalm 51:3–5 (NRSVCE))

THE PSALMS: UNWORTHY PLEA FOR FORGIVENESS AND RESTORATION



⁷Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean;
wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.

⁸Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones
that you have crushed rejoice.

⁹Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my
iniquities.

¹⁰Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a
new and right spirit within me. (Psalm 51:7–10
(NRSVCE))

THE PSALMS: INNOCENCE AND TRUST



²Prove me, O LORD, and try me; test my heart and mind.

³For your steadfast love is before my eyes, and I walk in faithfulness to you.

⁴I do not sit with the worthless, nor do I consort with hypocrites;

⁵I hate the company of evildoers, and will not sit with the wicked. (Psalm 26:2–5 (NRSVCE))

THE PSALMS: HATRED



⁷When he is tried, let him be found guilty; let his prayer be counted as sin.

⁸May his days be few; may another seize his position.

⁹May his children be orphans, and his wife a widow.

¹⁰May his children wander about and beg; may they be driven out of the ruins they inhabit.

Psalm 109:7–10 (NRSVCE)

THE TITLE “PSALMS”



- Hebrew: *Tehillim* or “Book of Praises”
- Greek: *Psalmos* Indicated a poem sung to the accompaniment of an instrument.
- Luke 20:42
 - "For David himself says in the book of Psalms, 'THE LORD SAID TO MY LORD, "SIT AT MY RIGHT HAND,
- Acts 1:20
 - "For it is written in the book of Psalms, 'LET HIS HOMESTEAD BE MADE DESOLATE, AND LET NO ONE DWELL IN IT'; and, 'LET ANOTHER MAN TAKE HIS OFFICE.'

AUTHORSHIP



- David – 73
- Asaph – 12
- Korah – 11
- Solomon – 2
- Moses – 1
- Heman – 1
- Ethan – 1
- Anonymous – 50



SUPERSCRIPTIONS



- Authorship
 - Psalm 24, “A Psalm of David”
- Hist. Background
 - Psalm 3, “...when he fled from Absalom”
- Character
 - Psalm 17, “A Prayer of David”
- Musical Direction
 - Psalm 45, “To the Lilies”
- Assignment
 - Psalm 4, “For the choir director”
- Intended Use
 - Psalm 92, “For the Sabbath Day”

DATES



- 1400 B.C. –
Psalm 90
(Moses)
- 1000-931 B.C.
– Most (David
& Solomon)
- 586-536 B.C. – Psalm 137 (Exile)
- 500 B.C. – Psalm 126 (Restoration)
- Lots of editorial arrangement, etc.



TYPES OF PSALMS

- Penitential (32,51)
- Didactic (1)
- Historical (78)
- Messianic (2,8,16,22)
- Hallelujah (106)
- Supplication (86)
- Thanksgiving (16,18)
- Nature (19)
- Ascent (120-134)
- Imprecatory (35)
- Acrostic (119)



WHY STUDY THE PSALMS?

- They are a part of God's inspired message.
- Containing Messianic prophecies, they tell us about Christ our Lord.
- They help us learn to pray, and how to pray.
- They provide a mirror of our soul.
- They contain timeless lessons vitally needed.



General Introduction to the Psalms

THE SYMPHONY OF PRAISE: INTERPRETING THE PSALMS

OUTLINE



- **The Orchestra of Hebrew Poetry**
 - Parallelism
 - Synonymous Parallelism
 - Antithetic Parallelism
 - Example: Psalm 1 in Parallelism and Structure
 - Chiastic Structure
- **Reading the Psalms through the Psalmists' Experience**
- **Reading the Psalms through the Apostles' & Saints' Experience**
 - Typology
 - Messianism
- **Principles for Interpreting the Psalms**
 - Principle 1: Determine Who Is Speaking
 - Principle 2: Determine if the Psalm Is Personal or Corporate
 - Principle 3: Determine for What Purpose the Psalm Was Written
 - Principle 4: Determine the Emotional Orientation of the Psalm
 - Principle 5: Determine the Genre of the Psalm if Possible
 - Principle 6: Determine if There Is a Refrain or Recurring Words and Phrases

PARALLELISM: THE KEY TO THE PSALMS



- The key to Hebrew poetry is a device called **parallelism**. It is a literary pattern that states an idea in one line and focuses more closely on the same idea in the following line, either repeating the thought in different terms or focusing on the thought more specifically.
- Dietrich Bonhoeffer speaks theologically about this feature of Hebrew poetry, insisting that a thought is sustained in Hebrew poetry, like a note of music is sustained by the human voice, giving more time to contemplate the ideas.
- This form is not simply accidental. It encourages us not to allow the prayer to be cut off prematurely, and it invites us to pray together with one another. That which seems to be unnecessary repetition to us, who are inclined to pray too hurriedly, is actually proper immersion and concentration in prayer.

SYNONYMOUS PARALLELISM



- The terms for the subtypes of parallelism are **synonymous** and **antithetic**. Synonymous parallelism simply means that the thought pattern in one line conforms to the pattern in the successive line.
- That does not mean, of course, that the thought in the successive line will be absolutely parallel. There are often nuances in the second line that enhance or alter the terms of the first line, but they will not contradict it. The movement is normally from the general to the specific, or from the less specific to the more specific.
- Psalm 27:1 provides an illustration of synonymous parallelism:
 The LORD is my light and my salvation—
 whom shall I fear?
 The LORD is the stronghold of my life—
 of whom shall I be afraid?
- Technical: We call the basic terms of the lines **units**, which are words or phrases that make up the larger thought segment. The larger thought constitutes a line. The Greek word for line, **stich**, and the Latin, **colon**, are commonly used to designate this unit. The lines themselves combine to form compound lines, which are named by the Greek or Latin **prefixes**; for example, a two-line compound thought is called a distich or **bicolon**, while a three-line compound thought constitutes a **tristich** or **tricolon**, and so forth.

FOUNDATIONAL STRUCTURE



A single verse in the Psalms is not necessarily equivalent to a distich or a tristich. As the example from Psalm 27:1 shows, this single verse is composed of *two distichs*.

Stich 1	Stich 2	Stich 3	Stich 4
The LORD (unit 1)		The LORD (unit 1)	
is my light (unit 2)		is the stronghold (unit 2)	
and my salvation (unit 3)		of my life (unit 3)	
	whom (unit 1)		of whom (unit 1)
	shall I fear? (unit 2)		shall I be afraid? (unit 2)

ANTITHETIC PARALLELISM



- Antithetic parallelism is a method of saying contrasting things in different lines and in different ways. The psalms employ this method, but this thought pattern is never sustained in the Psalms over long stretches of poetry as it is in Proverbs 10:1–15:33.
- As with synonymous parallelism, the “antithetic” thought is not a perfect antithesis but introduces an idea in the second line that contrasts with the idea in the previous line.
- Psalm 1 contains an example of antithetic parallelism. As is the manner of wisdom literature, to which this psalm belongs, the poem draws a contrast between two ways, that of the righteous person and that of the wicked.
 - The opening statement introduces unexplained categories of law breaking (“counsel of the wicked,” “way of sinners,” “seat of mockers”), and then the second statement points in the direction of delighting in the law.
 - The description of the righteous person continues in verse 3 before the psalm brings the life of the wicked into sharp relief to that of the righteous in verses 4 and 5.
 - A concluding contrast between the wicked and the righteous appears in verse 6. The general thought pattern, therefore, is thesis (v. 1) / antithesis (v. 2), thesis (v. 3) / antithesis (vv. 4–5), thesis (v. 6a) / antithesis (v. 6b). Let’s look closer:

PSALM 1



¹ Happy are those

who do not follow the advice of the wicked,
or take the path that sinners tread,
or sit in the seat of scoffers;

² but their delight is in the law of the LORD,
and on his law they meditate day and night.

³ They are like trees

planted by streams of water,
which yield their fruit in its season,
and their leaves do not wither.

In all that they do, they prosper.

⁴ The wicked are not so,

but are like chaff that the wind drives away.

⁵ Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment,
nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous;

⁶ for the LORD watches over the way of the righteous,
but the way of the wicked will perish.

PARALLELISM IN PSALM 1

Blessed is the man
who does not walk
in the counsel of the wicked
or stand in the way of sinners,
or sit in the seat of mockers.

Thesis



But his delight
is in the law of the Lord,
and on his law he meditates
day and night.

Antithesis

Thesis

He is like a tree planted by streams of water,
which yields its fruit in season
and whose leaf does not wither.
Whatever he does prospers.

Antithesis

Not so the wicked! They are like chaff that the wind blows away
Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment
nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous.

Thesis

For the Lord watches over the way of the righteous

Antithesis

But the way of the wicked will perish.

ANOTHER WAY OF SEEING PARALLELISM



Psalm 1 Hebrew Parallelism Structure

¹ How // (a) blessed is the man who does not walk (b) in the counsel of the wicked,
Nor (a) stand (b) in the path of sinners,
Nor (a) sit (b) in the seat of scoffers!

² // (a) But (b) his delight is in the law of the LORD,
(a) And in His law (b) he meditates day and night.

³ // (a) He will be like a tree *firmly* planted by streams of water,
(b) Which yields its fruit in its season
(b) And its leaf does not wither;
(c) And in whatever he does, he prospers.

⁴ // (a) The wicked are not so,
(b) But they are like chaff which the wind drives away.

⁵ Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment,
Nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous.

⁶ // (a) For the LORD knows (b) the way of the righteous,
(b) But the way of the wicked (c) will perish.

PARALLELISM & STRUCTURE

A — The righteous man stands not with the wicked

¹ How // (a) blessed is the man who does not walk (b) in the counsel of the wicked,
Nor (a) stand (b) in the path of sinners,
Nor (a) sit (b) in the seat of scoffers!

B — The blessed man chooses God's law

² // (a) But (b) his delight is in the law of the LORD,
(a) And in His law (b) he meditates day and night.

C — Green tree illustrates righteous man

³ // (a) He will be like a tree *firmly* planted by streams of water,
(b) Which yields its fruit in its season
(b) And its leaf does not wither;
(c) And in whatever he does, he prospers.

C — Brown chaff illustrates wicked man

⁴ // (a) The wicked are not so,
(b) But they are like chaff which the wind drives away.

A — The wicked man stands not with the righteous

⁵ Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment,
Nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous.

B — God chooses the righteous man

⁶ // (a) For the LORD knows (b) the way of the righteous,
(b) But the way of the wicked (c) will perish.

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER



Psalm 1 [Hebrew](#) [Parallelism](#) [Structure](#)

A — The righteous man stands not with the wicked

1 // אֲשֶׁר־יִהְיֶה אִישׁ אֲשֶׁר | לֹא הִלְךְ בְּעֵצַת רְשָׁעִים // אֲבָדְרָךְ חֲטָאִים לֹא עָמַד //
בְּמִזְבֵּי לֹא יָשָׁב:

B — The blessed man chooses God's law

2 // כִּי אִם בְּתוֹרַת יְהוָה חִפְצוֹ // וּבְתוֹרָתוֹ יִהְיֶה יוֹמָם וְלַיְלָה:

C — Green tree illustrates righteous man

3 // וְהָיָה כְּעֵץ שֶׁתּוֹלַעַל־פְּלִי מֵיָם // אֲשֶׁר פָּרְיוֹ יִתֵּן בְּעִתּוֹ // וְעֵלְהוֹ לֹא־
יִבּוֹל // וְכֹל אֲשֶׁר־יַעֲשֶׂה יִצְלִיחַ:

C — Brown chaff illustrates wicked man

4 // לֹא־כֵן הֲרֵשָׁעִים // כִּי אִם־כַּפְמִין אֲשֶׁר־תִּדְפְּנֵנוּ רוּחַ:

A — The wicked man stands not with the righteous

5 // עַל־כֵּן לֹא־יִקְמוּ רְשָׁעִים בְּמִשְׁפַּט חֲטָאִים בְּעֵדַת צְדִיקִים:

B — God chooses the righteous man

6 // כִּי־יִדְעַ יְהוָה בְּיִדְעֵה צְדִיקִים // וְדַרְךְ רְשָׁעִים תִּאֲבֹד:

A — The righteous man stands not with the wicked

1 How // a blessed is the man who does not walk b in the counsel of the wicked,
Nor a stand b in the path of sinners,
Nor a sit b in the seat of scoffers!

B — The blessed man chooses God's law

2 // a But b his delight is in the law of the LORD,
a And in His law b he meditates day and night.

C — Green tree illustrates righteous man

3 // a He will be like a tree firmly planted by streams of water,
b Which yields its fruit in its season
b And its leaf does not wither;
c And in whatever he does, he prospers.

C — Brown chaff illustrates wicked man

4 // a The wicked are not so,
b But they are like chaff which the wind drives away.

A — The wicked man stands not with the righteous

5 Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment,
Nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous.

B — God chooses the righteous man

6 // a For the LORD knows b the way of the righteous,
b But the way of the wicked c will perish.

CHIASTIC STRUCTURE



- Another feature of Hebrew poetry is the chiasm. This word comes from the Greek word *chiazein*, meaning to place crosswise or in the shape of the Greek letter chi (χ).
- This device may mark the structure of entire psalms or merely parts of psalms. There are as many as twenty-one psalms that exhibit this structural characteristic, and he cites Psalm 8 as a model:

A Benediction (v. 1)

B God's rule (vv. 2–3)

C Human meanness (v. 4)

C' Human greatness (v. 5)

B' Humanity's rule (vv. 6–8)

A' Benediction (v. 9)

READING THE PSALM THROUGH THE PSALMISTS' EXPERIENCE



- The synagogue and church have long interpreted the Psalms as having multiple levels of meaning, and anyone who has ever read Psalm 51 and applied it personally has keyed into one or more of those levels of meaning. But, the historical experience of the psalmists is fundamental to understanding their thought. **We need to ask the question, “What did the words mean in their historical context?” Our first obligation to the text is to hear their words in and through that context.** Only then can we understand the psalmists’ experience.
- For example, Psalm 22 begins with the psalmist’s lament, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” Christians are likely to hear these words immediately as Jesus’ words from the cross. Yet, to be fair to the historical context, we should assume that they were spoken by a real person in ancient Israel, very likely even David himself at some God-forsaken moment of his life. It is much safer and fairer to the text to begin at the historical/cultural level and hear in them the suffering of an ancient Israelite.
- There are two ways in which we may understand Jesus’ use of these words, either as fuller sense (*sensus plenior*) or typology. The interpretive principle of fuller sense assumes that some expressions of human experience in the Old Testament far exceeded the real historical experience of the persons involved.
- In metaphorical language, he further describes his enemies as “strong bulls of Bashan” and “roaring lions” (Ps 22:12, 13). Bashan was known for its fine cattle (Am 4:1) and the jungle of the Jordan for its lions, and the nature of these beasts obviously contributed a note of fierceness to the psalmist’s description of his enemies.
- While apart from the historical/cultural setting of the psalm we can see Jesus suffering for us in a vicarious way, when we start with the historical setting of the psalm, we see him suffering with us as well. That has been a comfort to countless believers who have passed through the valley of suffering.

READING THE PSALMS THROUGH THE APOSTLES' & SAINTS' EXPERIENCE



The Book of Psalms is quoted more often in the New Testament than any other Old Testament book. The Psalter is filled with imagery and ideas that point directly to Jesus. The Savior died on the cross with the wrenching words of Psalm 22:1 and the trusting words of Psalm 31:5 on his lips (Matthew 27:46; Luke 23:46); and after his resurrection, he drew upon this book to explain what his death and resurrection meant (Luke 24:44). While the apostles followed this interpretive mode, Jesus did much to provide the grounds on which the early church would see him in the Psalms.

Typology. Typology figures among the methods that the New Testament uses to interpret the Psalms. It finds a person or idea in one era of history and draws attention to the analogous shape or experience of another person or idea. In comparison, allegory does not rise out of the historical context but is imposed on the text by the interpreter. St. John's application of Psalm 69:9 to Jesus' cleansing of the temple ("Zeal for your house will consume me," John 2:17) is an example of typology. That is, the psalmist's zeal for God's house became a model for Jesus' zeal for the temple. Therefore, it is not only permissible but incumbent upon the interpreter to put the psalm into its larger biblical context. Yet typology can easily get out of hand; the typological interpretation of the Psalms should be handled discreetly, and the New Testament should set its perimeters.

Messianism. Once the reader acknowledges the principle of exegesis that an underlying unity joins Old Testament Israel and the New Testament church together in a theological connectedness, then interpreting the Psalms messianically springs naturally from this working hermeneutic. Christian readers of the Psalms should exercise caution not to overmessianize this book, but they need not follow the trend of modern scholarship and abandon the category of messianic psalms altogether, so long as their historical meaning is not abandoned. Traditionally a psalm was considered messianic if, having no relationship to its historical context, it anticipated the Messiah or predicted the Messiah.

PRINCIPLES FOR INTERPRETING THE PSALMS



1. Determine **Who Is Speaking**
2. Determine if the Psalm Is **Personal or Corporate**
(Song of Praise, Song of Lament, etc.)
3. Determine for **What Purpose** the Psalm Was Written
4. Determine the **Emotional Orientation** of the Psalm
5. Determine the **Genre of the Psalm** if Possible
6. Determine if There Is a **Refrain or Recurring Words and Phrases**

PRINCIPLE 1: DETERMINE WHO IS SPEAKING



- Generally the psalmist will be speaking on his own behalf or on Israel's or God's. But God also speaks frequently in the Psalms, and the reader should be listening for a change of voice. Psalm 50, for example, begins with the psalmist's announcement that God speaks: "The Mighty One, God, the LORD, / speaks and summons the earth / from the rising of the sun to the place where it sets" (v. 1).
- We know immediately that we should be listening for God's voice, and it comes first in verse 5 when he says: "Gather to me my consecrated ones, / who have made a covenant with me by sacrifice." At that point the psalm reverts to the voice of the psalmist: "And the heavens proclaim his righteousness, / for God himself is judge" (v. 6). The next voice we hear is God's again: "Hear, O my people, and I will speak, / O Israel, and I will testify against you: / I am God, your God" (v. 7).
- And the divine voice continues through verse 15, when the psalmist briefly interjects with another announcement that God is about to speak (v. 16a). This final word from God completes the psalm (vv. 16b–23). The Asaph psalms (Pss 50, 73–83) exhibit this characteristic frequently.

PRINCIPLE 2: DETERMINE IF THE PSALM IS PERSONAL OR CORPORATE



- Readers should ask whether the psalmist is speaking as an individual or on Israel's behalf. Hermann Gunkel introduced his view of the psalms as temple songs, speaking with the corporate voice of Israel. An overwhelming number of the Psalms were spoken or prayed by an individual, but there are notable examples where the community or nation speaks.
- A number of such examples occur in the Songs of Ascents (Pss 120–34). Psalm 124 illustrates this point. Israel celebrates the Lord's miraculous deliverance in times of peril, and this is most evident in the plural pronouns and the summons for Israel to respond:

If the LORD had not been on our side—
let Israel say—
We have escaped like a bird
out of the fowler's snare;
the snare has been broken,
and we have escaped.
Our help is in the name of the LORD,
the Maker of heaven and earth. (vv. 1, 7–8)

- Psalm 126 is another example: “When the LORD brought back the captives to Zion, / we were like men who dreamed” (v. 1). Psalm 132 is another song of the community.
- Klaus Westermann has broken down his two basic categories of psalms, **praise and lament, into individual lament and community lament**. In the psalms of praise, he finds evidence for this distinction only in the declarative psalms of praise.
- Basic 4 Types: **Community/Individual Hymn of Praise/Thanksgiving; Community/Individual Lament**

PRINCIPLE 3: DETERMINE FOR WHAT PURPOSE THE PSALM WAS WRITTEN



- Occasionally the historical titles may help us determine the purpose for which the psalmist wrote. For example, Psalm 51 has the title “A psalm of David. When the prophet Nathan came to him after David had committed adultery with Bathsheba.” While I would not insist that the historical titles necessarily belong to the time of the psalm’s composition, this one very well could. In that setting, and against the background of 2 Samuel 11–12, the reader can grasp the meaning of this psalm quite readily.
- The historical setting for most psalms, however, is not as easy as this one. The reader is left to determine the historical/cultural circumstances on the basis of internal information. A good place to start is to ask the question, What is the problem? Was it the psalmist’s enemies, or some illness, or a theological issue that moved him to write the poem?
- In Psalm 69, an imprecatory psalm, David lays out the abuse his enemies have perpetrated against him, and then he puts it in the context of God’s larger plan: “For I endure scorn for your sake, / and shame covers my face” (v. 7; emphasis added).
- But David cannot leave the matter there. Rather he is compelled, rightly or wrongly, to put the offense in the context of divine judgment and describe a program of retribution. It may be his view of what God’s punishment would look like when it came. Or it is possible that David’s heart had turned vindictive toward his enemies. His two ways of solving the problem were: (1) recognizing his suffering to be for God’s sake, so he should not be so much concerned about vindication, since God will take care of that; (2) praying that God will punish them for their ill-treatment of him. These two ways seem contradictory, unless, of course, David’s description is nothing more than that and not a prayer that God will obliterate them. Of course, even if David was merely turning the matter over to God’s sense of judgment and fairness, it would certainly have been to his credit if he had prayed for their salvation. While the Old Testament contains the basic gospel, we have to admit that praying for our enemies is not one of its theological principles, although it comes close (see Exodus 23:4–5).

PRINCIPLE 4: DETERMINE THE EMOTIONAL ORIENTATION OF THE PSALM



- **The reader should ascertain whether the author is praising or lamenting.** The tone can waver between the two, but often one tone will be dominant. Usually these divide between praise and lament. An illustration of an individual lament is Psalm 27. Nowhere does the psalmist burst forth in praise, but he sustains the lament throughout the poem. Yet the last two verses express his confidence that the Lord has heard him:
 - I am still confident of this:
I will see the goodness of the LORD
in the land of the living.
Wait for the LORD;
be strong and take heart
and wait for the LORD. (vv. 13–14)
- An example of a psalm that combines lament and praise is Psalm 13. After a prayer in which David asked the Lord how long he would forget him (vv. 1–2), followed by a petition that God would deliver him out of his crisis, he breaks into a stanza of praise:
 - But I trust in your unfailing love;
my heart rejoices in your salvation.
I will sing to the LORD,
for he has been good to me. (vv. 5–6)
- The sum of the matter is that, when we interpret the Psalms, it makes a lot of difference whether the mode of the psalmist is lament or praise, or a combination of the two. Even if it is lament alone with a vow to praise or an expression of confidence in the Lord's faithfulness, then that lament has no fixed edges but flows in the direction of praise.

PRINCIPLE 5: DETERMINE THE GENRE OF THE PSALM IF POSSIBLE



- Look for clues of the basic genres:
 - **address**, with a cry for help and/or turning to God
 - **lament**, with its three common subjects: God, I (the psalmist), and the enemies
 - **confession of trust**
 - **petition**, that God will be favorable or for God to intervene
 - **assurance** that the psalmist was heard
 - **vow of praise**
 - **praise of God** (when the petition has been answered)
- Because the psalmists did not have a list of these items before them, which rather has been constructed on the basis of the psalms, we need not expect to find every single component in every single individual lament. Yet the fact that it is possible to identify common elements in this genre is quite helpful.
- Some psalms may exhibit characteristics of more than one genre.

PRINCIPLE 6: DETERMINE IF THERE IS A REFRAIN OR RECURRING WORDS AND PHRASES



- Examine the preceding and following psalms to see if the same refrain or words and phrases occur. The recurrence of a refrain is obvious in Psalms 42 and 43:

Why are you downcast, O my soul?
Why so disturbed within me?
Put your hope in God,
for I will yet praise him,
my Savior and my God. (42:5, 11; 43:5)

- This, of course, is one of the reasons why these two psalms are considered to be a single psalm. This refrain gives a general emotional perspective to the psalm: the psalmist is depressed about something, and the psalm informs us that the problem is that he has been hindered from going to the sanctuary.
- Psalm 8 begins and ends with a refrain and puts the psalm into the frame of praise and wonderment: “O LORD, our Lord, / how majestic is your name in all the earth!”

PSALM 23(NRSVCE)



A Psalm of David.

¹The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want.

²He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters;

³he restores my soul. He leads me in right paths for his name's sake.

⁴Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff— they comfort me.

⁵You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.

⁶Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD my whole life long.

INTRODUCTION



- The Divine Shepherd (23:1-4)
 - What are the images about God’s care for His people in these verses?
 - Set this psalm in the deserts of Palestine; how does it change your perception?
 - Why are these images fitting for King David?
- The Divine Host (23:5-6)
 - What are the risks in following the Shepherd? How do they relate to our lives today?
 - What is the ultimate destiny for the Psalmist? What is ours?

THE SHEPHERD IN SCRIPTURE



They shall not hunger or thirst, neither scorching wind nor sun shall strike them down, for he who has pity on them will lead them, and by springs of water will guide them. (Isaiah 49:10)

He will feed his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms, and carry them in his bosom, and gently lead the mother sheep. (Isaiah 40:11)

I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I will make them lie down, says the Lord GOD. (Ezekiel 34:15)

I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them: he shall feed them and be their shepherd. (Ezekiel 34:23)

“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.” (John 10:11)

... for the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of the water of life, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.” (Revelation 7:17)

A Psalm of David. ¹ The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want.

מְזַמֵּר לְדָוִד יְהוָה רֹעִי לֹא אֶחְסָר:
[do I] lack not my Yahweh of David A Psalm
shepherd

² He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters;

בְּנֵאוֹת דְּשָׁא יְרִבִּיצְנִי עַל-מֵי מְנַחֹת יְנַהֲלֵנִי:
he leads me by/beside waters he causes me in [the] grazing
of repose to lie down pastures of
greenness

³ he restores my soul. He leads me in right paths for his name's sake.

נַפְשִׁי יִשׁוּבֵב יְנַחֲנֵי בְּמַעְגְּלֵי-צֶדֶק לְמַעַן שְׁמוֹ:
his name for the sake [of] in [the] tracks he he my soul
righteousness [of] leads me restores

⁴ Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff— they comfort me.

גַּם כִּי-אֶלֶךְ בְּגִיא צַלְמוֹת לֹא-אֵירָא רָע
bād fear will I not deep in [the] I walk when
darkness valley

כִּי-אַתָּה עִמָּדִי שִׁבְטְךָ וְזַמְשֵׁנְךָ הֵמָּה יְנַחֲמֵנִי:
comfort [me] they your staff and your rod your are you/your for
with me

⁵ You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.

תַּעֲרֹךְ לִפְנֵי שִׁלְחֹן יִגְדֵּד צִוְחֵי דִשְׁנֹתַי בְּשֶׁמֶן
with oil you anoint in presence of a table before me you arrange
my enemies

is overflowing my cup my head
רֹאשִׁי כּוֹסֵי רוּיָה:

⁶ Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD my whole

אֲרוֹ טוֹב וְחַסֵּד יְרַדְפוּנִי כָּל-יְמֵי חַיֵּי וְשִׁבְתִּי
I will return/I will dwell all my days they pursue me and mercy good surely
steadfast love

for the length of days Yahweh the house [of]

Insights from the Ancients

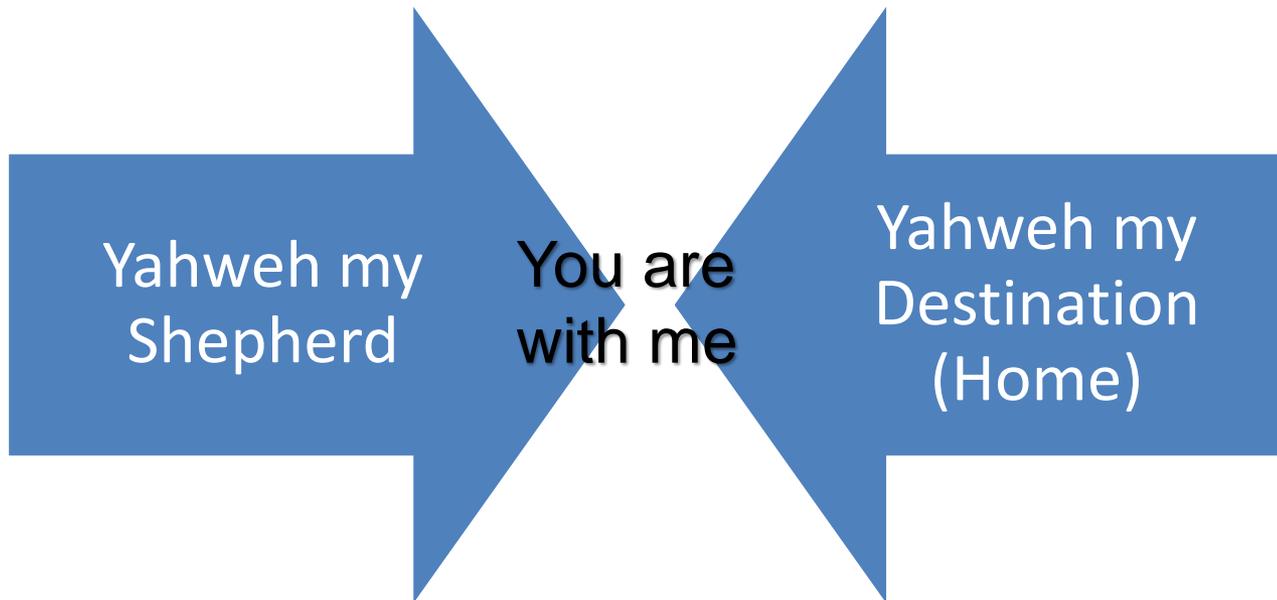


Augustine: “the Church is speaking to Christ, for he has lead me to faith in a field of fresh grass . . . he has nurtured me beside the water of baptism, where those who have lost their soundness and strength are made new ... Your discipline is like a rod used on a flock of sheep, and like a staff used to support older children as they grow from sensuous to spiritual life. They have done me no harm; rather they have encouraged me, because you are mindful of me.” (*Commentary on the Psalms*, p.244.)

STRUCTURE



- 23:1 Yahweh
- 23:4 You (“thou”) are with me (one word)
- 23:6 Yahweh



PSALM 23: IN SUMMARY



- Almost pretentious to comment on this psalm; but what do you think? What images are the most powerful and lingering?
- This is the Ultimate Psalm of Confidence:
 - Rich metaphors
 - A life lived in trustful receptivity to God’s gifts
 - Life with Yahweh is a life of well-being and satisfaction
 - Yahweh means *l’o acksar* “shall not want” (used without any object—food, money, safety, etc.); the satisfaction of lacks runs deep in Israel’s memory (Deuteronomy 2:7 –manna) See also Nehemiah 9:21
 - “Lying down” is a strong symbol of peace and tranquility (Isaiah 11:6-7; 14:30; Jeremiah 33:12; Ezekiel 34:14-15) and the end of fear (Job 11:19; Zephaniah 3:13)—the effect of this is refreshment and renewal
 - “You are with me” is the heart of the psalm; God’s companionship changes every situation
 - The plight here is physical and spiritual; the deliverance “feels” to be both physical and spiritual, too.
 - Evil is present in this world, but ultimately it is not to be feared; confidence in God is the source of our new orientation
 - You don’t have to be afraid is the core of the Gospel message. “I am with you always” is the final promise of Christ to His people.”

PSALM 23, IN OTHER WORDS



Praise Dog.

Snuck in the gate looking for scraps.

Bad Man closed the gate and I was trapped.

Rope on my neck. Kick on my tail.

Dumb Dog.

Jesus snuck in the gate looking for me.

Slipped off the rope and we were running.

Free Dog.

Snoozing on the porch in a patch of sun.

Bad Man passes by the gate. I just growl.

Jesus rubs my neck where the rope left a scar.

Praise Dog.



FAVORITE PSALMS



Discipleship in an Instant Society

A LONG OBEDIENCE: THE PSALMS OF ASCENT



About the Psalms of Ascent

Psalm 120” “Woe is me, that I sojourn in
Meshech (Repentance)

Psalm 122: “Let us go up to the House of the
Lord (Worship)

Psalm 123: “Our eyes looked to the Lord our
God” (Service)

Psalm 126: “Then our mouth was full of
laughter (Joy)

Psalm 127: “Unless the Lord builds the house”
(Work)

Psalm 131: “My eyes are not raised too high”
(Humility)

Psalm 133: “Like the precious oil upon the
head (Community)

THE PSALMS OF ASCENT

INSIGHTS ON DISCIPLESHIP FROM PSALMS 120-134 (SELECTIONS)

SONGS OF THE ROAD: THE PSALMS OF ASCENT



A section of the fifth and final book of the psalter includes 15 psalms (120-134) that are often called the pilgrim psalms, or the songs of ascent. The best explanation of their use is in connection with the pilgrimages, a time when the Jews ascended to their sacred Holy City set on five hills.

- The men of Israel over 30 years of age were commanded to attend three of the seven Jewish festivals instituted prior to the exile. These feasts were special times of national convocation, dedication, and devotion. All year long, families were to set aside funds as part of their tithe in order to pay for the expenses of these journeys to Jerusalem. During the time of the feasts, every day was as the Sabbath and all work was to be suspended (Leviticus 16:29; 23:7-8, 21, 24-28, 35-36).
- After David returned the Ark to Jerusalem and essentially established his dynasty (1000 B.C.), the city became the center of worship and probably was the place from where most of the Psalms were written. In the case of the pilgrim psalms, Jerusalem is a major theme. Jerusalem, Zion, the Temple, and thrones are repeatedly mentioned.
- In a unique way these psalms seem to capture and mix four elements that would have been prominently on the minds of nearly every Jew journeying to the feasts:
 - Rejoicing in God’s past dealings with them as a nation, either by way of entering into covenant, miraculously delivering them, or miraculously sustaining them
 - Gratitude to God for His present material provision for them in the most recent harvest or in the complete year of harvests
 - Exulting in Israel’s anticipated glorious future
 - Confirming to them that the God of their spiritual past and of their glorious future, who was presently providing materially for them, would also be their present Spiritual Rock. In their travels they were not immune to struggles brought on by the threats of enemies to their home, hardships on the journey, or even the threat of disunity with other pilgrims. These psalms stabilize them in their present circumstances.
- **CONCLUSION:** The pilgrims learned to meet life’s struggles with specific songs—songs that helped them respond to their struggles and prepared them to meet with God. We are looking forward to gaining an insightful glimpse into the heartfelt music of Israel’s pilgrims and learn of the parallels of their pilgrimages to our own heavenward journey.



PSALM 120: REPENTANCE

“WOE IS ME, THAT I
SOJOURN IN MESHECH”

PSALM 120



A Song of Ascents.

¹In my distress I cry to the LORD, that he may answer me:

²“Deliver me, O LORD, from lying lips, from a deceitful tongue.”

³What shall be given to you? And what more shall be done to you, you deceitful tongue?

⁴A warrior’s sharp arrows, with glowing coals of the broom tree!

⁵Woe is me, that I am an alien in Meshech, that I must live among the tents of Kedar.

⁶Too long have I had my dwelling among those who hate peace.

⁷I am for peace; but when I speak, they are for war.

DISCUSSION



- “An alien in Meschech, that I must live among the tents of Kedar”?
- What kind of hymn is this?
- What is the experience of the individual?
- What is his/her spiritual condition?



PSALM 122: WORSHIP

“LET US GO TO THE HOUSE
OF THE LORD!”

PSALM 122

A Song of Ascents. Of David

¹I was glad when they said to me,
“Let us go to the house of the LORD!”

²Our feet are standing
within your gates, O Jerusalem.

³Jerusalem—built as a city
that is bound firmly together.

⁴To it the tribes go up,
the tribes of the LORD,
as was decreed for Israel,
to give thanks to the name of the LORD.

⁵For there the thrones for judgment were set up,
the thrones of the house of David.

⁶Pray for the peace of Jerusalem:
“May they prosper who love you.

⁷Peace be within your walls,
and security within your towers.”

⁸For the sake of my relatives and friends
I will say, “Peace be within you.”

⁹For the sake of the house of the LORD our God,
I will seek your good.



DISCUSSION



- The pilgrim has arrived! (Envision the goal of the journey)
- Psalm 122 is a psalm about someone who decides to worship, faithfully, devoutly
- “I was glad”
- “Jerusalem is built”—all the parts are there!
- “Decreed”—we need this!
- Peace and security—*shalom* and *shalvah*



PSALM 126: JOY

“THEN OUR MOUTH WAS
FILLED WITH LAUGHTER”

PSALM 126

A Song of Ascents. Of David

¹When the LORD restored the fortunes of Zion,
we were like those who dream.

²Then our mouth was filled with laughter,
and our tongue with shouts of joy;
then it was said among the nations,
“The LORD has done great things for them.”

³The LORD has done great things for us,
and we rejoiced.

⁴Restore our fortunes, O LORD,
like the watercourses in the Negeb.

⁵May those who sow in tears
reap with shouts of joy.

⁶Those who go out weeping,
bearing the seed for sowing,
shall come home with shouts of joy,
carrying their sheaves.



DISCUSSION



- Note the shifts in time in the psalm.
- When is the “when”, “then”, “now” and “tomorrow” in this psalm?
- How can the psalmist participate in the past experience of the community? What is the present circumstance of the community?
- How is this experience like the sacraments?
- How is “laughter” and “joy” a mark of a true faith?

ON CHRISTIAN JOY



- We “are” glad (vs. 4-6), but our fortunes are in need of restoration
 - What does this tell us about true joy?
 - What are the two images here?
 - Negev...the courses of the *wadis*
 - All of the barrenness and suffering can be redemptive if we are conscious of God
 - Sowing & reaping
 - All sowing is redemptive if we are conscious of God
 - Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. (Philippians 4:4-5)
 - Therefore, to keep me from being too elated, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me, to keep me from being too elated. Three times I appealed to the Lord about this, that it would leave me, but he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness.” So, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities for the sake of Christ; for whenever I am weak, then I am strong. (2 Corinthians 12:7-10)



PSALM 127: WORK

**“UNLESS THE LORD BUILDS
THE HOUSE”**

PSALM 122

A Song of Ascents. Of Solomon

¹Unless the LORD builds the house,
those who build it labor in vain.

Unless the LORD guards the city,
the guard keeps watch in vain.

²It is in vain that you rise up early
and go late to rest,
eating the bread of anxious toil;
for he gives sleep to his beloved.

³Sons are indeed a heritage from the LORD,
the fruit of the womb a reward.

⁴Like arrows in the hand of a warrior
are the sons of one's youth.

⁵Happy is the man who has
his quiver full of them.

He shall not be put to shame
when he speaks with his enemies in the gate.



DISCUSSION



- What kinds of work are described here?
- What kinds of work are in vain?
- Understanding Western and Eastern concepts of work
- What kind of “work” is praised?



PSALM 131: HUMILITY

“MY EYES ARE NOT RAISED
TOO HIGH”

PSALM 122

A Song of Ascents. Of David



¹O LORD, my heart is not lifted up,
my eyes are not raised too high;

I do not occupy myself with things
too great and too marvelous for me.

²But I have calmed and quieted my soul,
like a weaned child with its mother;
my soul is like the weaned child that is with me.

³O Israel, hope in the LORD
from this time on and forevermore.

DISCUSSION



- What are the images here?
- What is the tone?
- What is the difference between confidence & arrogance?
- How has the psalmist “calmed” himself? How can we?



PSALM 133: COMMUNITY

“LIKE THE PRECIOUS OIL
UPON THE HEAD”

PSALM 133

A Song of Ascents. Of David

¹How very good and pleasant it is
when kindred live together in unity!
²It is like the precious oil on the head,
running down upon the beard,
on the beard of Aaron,
running down over the collar of his robes.
³It is like the dew of Hermon,
which falls on the mountains of Zion.
For there the LORD ordained his blessing,
life forevermore.



IMAGES IN PSALM 133



- “Precious oil upon the head, running upon the beard, upon the beard of Aaron, running down on the collar of his robes”
- “Now this is what you shall do to them to consecrate them, so that they may serve me as priests . . . ⁴ You shall bring Aaron and his sons to the entrance of the tent of meeting, and wash them with water. ⁵ Then you shall take the vestments, and put on Aaron the tunic and the robe of the ephod, and the ephod, and the breastpiece, and gird him with the decorated band of the ephod; ⁶ and you shall set the turban on his head, and put the holy diadem on the turban. ⁷ You shall take the anointing oil, and pour it on his head and anoint him. ⁸ Then you shall bring his sons, and put tunics on them, ⁹ and you shall gird them with sashes and tie headdresses on them; and the priesthood shall be theirs by a perpetual ordinance. You shall then ordain Aaron and his sons. “(Exodus 29:1-9)
- How is unity like this?

IMAGES IN PSALM 133



- “the dew of Hermon”
- What does this image suggest?
- What does oil & dew, taken together, tell us about community, and unity?

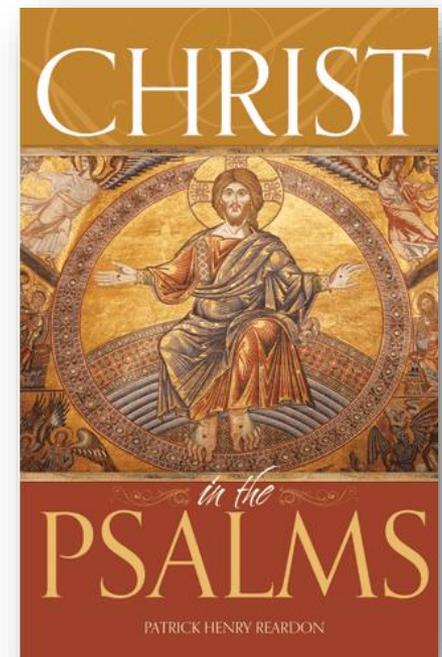
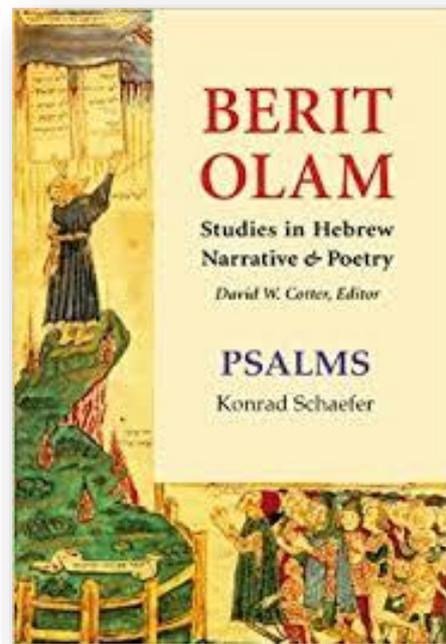
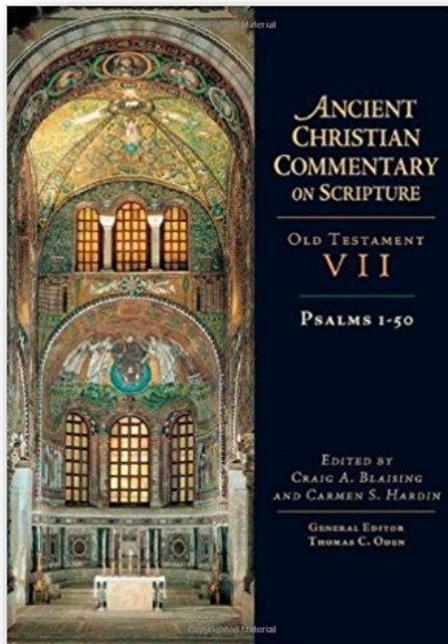
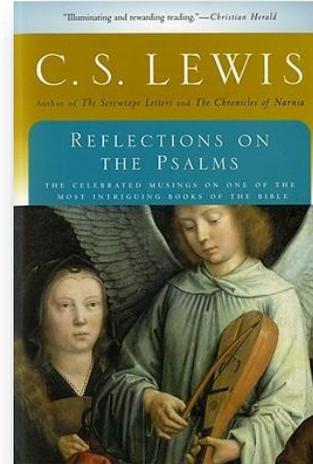
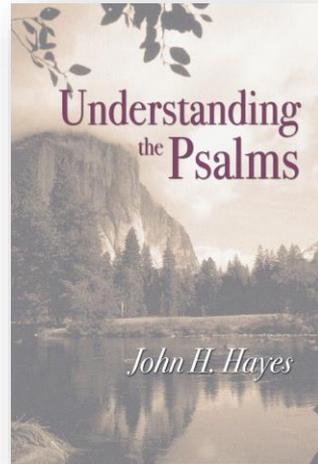
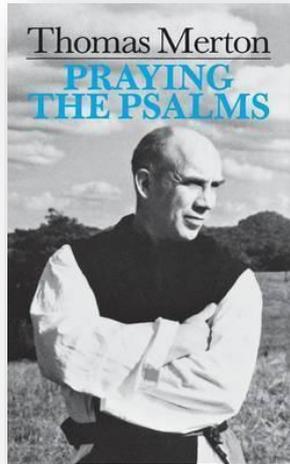


DISCUSSION



- Unity: oil
- Spirituality without community is illusory, self-centered, and ultimately frustrating
- Just because we live in a community of faith doesn't mean we don't live with sinners
- So the question is not IF I am going to be in a community, but HOW am I to live in it?
- It takes energy to live in community

FOR FURTHER READING



APPLICATION (NEXT TIME): THE BLUES



"Valley Of Pain" Bonnie Raitt

Ah... don't let me grow bitter I pray
Give me strength to carry on my way
I'm leanin on you like a wooden cane
Well, I'm walkin through; I'm walkin through the valley of the pain

I'm believing there's a reason for this trial
This too shall pass in a little while
Woh, Lord have mercy if I complain
I'm walkin through, I'm walkin through the valley of the pain

Paint me in a river of my tears
Whisper hope and truth - courage in my ears

Well, when I'm hurtin I have a dangerous tongue
I lose it and use it like a gun
Oh wont you stop me if you see me takin aim
I'm walkin through, I'm walkin through the valley of the pain

Paint me in a river of my tears
Whisper hope and truth - courage in my ears
Remind me when I reach the other side
I'll be thankful for every tear that I cried.



Psalm 128

“MAY THE LORD BLESS YOU
FROM ZION”

PSALM 128

A Song of Ascents.

¹Happy is everyone who fears the LORD,
who walks in his ways.

²You shall eat the fruit of the labor of your hands;
you shall be happy, and it shall go well with you.

³Your wife will be like a fruitful vine
within your house;
your children will be like olive shoots
around your table.

⁴Thus shall the man be blessed
who fears the LORD.

⁵The LORD bless you from Zion.
May you see the prosperity of Jerusalem
all the days of your life.

⁶May you see your children's children.
Peace be upon Israel!





QUESTIONS & COMMENTS